

Confidential.

DJ/WP.

FAMILY WELFARE DIVISION.Box Hill Boys' Home.

Following Mr. Booth's direction I visited this home on 20.2.70 and spent several hours discussing its immediate past, present and possible future, with the new Manager Brigadier P. Steer and the School Headmaster, Mr. McKenzie. I did not talk seriously with any of the boys on this occasion as there have been far reaching changes of regimen whose effects it is too early to appreciate. I will carry out this part of the direction on my next visit.

I have also been the recipient of a long monologue from Mr. Stolk, unofficial assistant manager in 1969, who came to this office on 19.2.70 to discuss his own future.*

Each of these people see and present a different view-point on last year's events.

1. Brigadier Steer is unsure how far specific acts of cruelty were practiced but was aware (he was employed on the Head Quarters staff for the last part of 1969 and was involved in all relevant deliberations there) that morale was low among both boys and staff, that domestic procedures were antiquated and cumbersome and that hard pressed, insufficient and unskilful staff were resorting to cuffing, threatening, etc.

2. The school headmaster thinks that the allegations of maltreatment made by Mr. Watkinson were quite without foundations. He feels that lads were well fed, cheerful and unafraid of staff. Any physical marks commented on during swimming lessons were always described as the result of a scrap with another lad. He feels that if anything the atmosphere is less pleasant at the moment - qualifying this by saying that he makes a point of co-operating with Home staff but is not particularly familiar with them.

3. Mr. Stolk complains that the home has gone downhill since Brigadier Steer's arrival, that two long-established employees have gone (cook and matron) and that he himself is expecting to leave. He feels that Brigadier Steer has slighted him by not taking him at all into his confidence and tends to undercut staff's authority vis-a-vis the boys. He thinks Brigadier Steer is "rough" however with lads and like the Headmaster, feels the tone of the place has changed for the worse.

Present Arrangements:

Very considerable changes have been made.

1. Numbers have been reduced to a desirable maximum of 50 and an absolute maximum of 60. This is a vast drop from 150 accommodated at the Merritt Survey in 1956. Only primary school boys will be admitted in 1970, for reasons which will be made clear later.

2. Accommodation is being used in a totally different fashion from previously. Lads are arranged in three groups, each group containing boys of all ages. One group, of 22 boys, lives in the main building, using existent sleeping accommodation in a less crowded fashion and having the former infirmary as a T.V. room-cum-lounge. A second group of 12 lads lives in the older weatherboard dormitory block attached to the main house, using one half of it as sleeping quarters and the other as a lounge. This marks the demise of the last Bed-Wetters' Dormitory in Victorian Children's Homes - though the smell remains. The remaining group of boys is housed in the detached No.4 section.

Staff consists of:

Superintendent: Brigadier P. Steer.
Matron: Mrs. Steer.
Office Manager: Brigadier Van Kralingen.

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For each of the 2 Howard House groups, 2 male child care workers and a woman whose main job is cleaning, care of clothing, etc.

In the No.4 Section, a married couple. Care staff relieve each other to the extent where all should get regular time off composed of 1 full day per week, 1 evening per week and 1 weekend in three.

Two cooks and 2 laundresses. ~~NP~~ I have met some of them and was not impressed. Domestic procedures have been streamlined e.g. clean clothes are given out in the sections instead of the whole establishment lining up in and outside a ricketty shed for underpants and socks issue twice weekly. Women staff are expected to do most of the cleaning, obviating a good deal of boy labour.

Schooling: Twenty-four lads are attending Secondary Schools. With only 26 boys in the attached Primary School, its continued existence is doubtful, although it can be kept for some time as a viable concern if about 10 more junior boys are admitted to the Home. At the moment the 26 boys have a total of 7 staff attending to them.

The Head is extremely interested in the type of lad he is teaching - the rough and ready little school-failure pre-delinquent Baltara boys ^{as well as} and the institutionalised graduates from East Kew and East Camberwell and would like to see them catered for in the future. He feels that some of his lads could manage in the normal local schools but a significant proportion could not, either because they are too retarded academically or because they have a history of school failure which makes them social misfits or truants. He would very much like to see the present school, preferably resited, expand its function by accepting district children for ~~high~~ remedial and O.G. work as well as ^{keeping} a proportion of the Box Hill boys. More competent Box Hill lads could attend normal local schools. Should the Home continue on its present site and accomodate the same type of lad as it does now the Head will discuss some such plan with officers of the Education Department.

Discipline: I made it clear to Brigadier Steer that the only acceptable means of physical correction is spanking on the boys' hand or buttocks with a staff member's hand. He is aware that handling of boys alternated previously between regimented lineups and virtually unsupervised mischief and is trying to get staff to the point where they can exercise informal but firm control. The fact that groups are smaller should make this easier but staff will need a good deal of instruction. I would not like to hazard a guess as to how this place will function over the next few months.

Future: According to Brigadier Steer, the Army is aware of the problems at Box Hill - are so aware of them in fact that they have put off making a decision about the place until a large number of lesser decisions about other works were dealt with. Really solid thinking about its future is expected to begin in the Autumn of this year.

Brigadier Steer is the first Box Hill Superintendent I have met who is sufficiently "in" with the H.Q. Staff to know what is going on at a reasonably high level and to have some influence on their decisions. He sees a number of different possibilities existing for Box Hill, each of which has its protagonists.

1. That the place be completely closed down and the Army go out of boy's work, except perhaps the work with delinquents now being done at Bayswater. The site could be used for some other activity or sold to provide funds for running extant works.

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2. That the work be continued, but that new buildings be completely resited or confined to a portion of the present site. This would involve selling all or most of the surrounding land.
3. That part of the land be sold and family groups be built on the remainder. This would involve the possible closure of one of the other Homes, whose girl residents would join the boys at Box Hill.
4. Similar to 3 above, except that all the land would be sold and scattered family groups be operated.
5. That most of the land be sold and two groups of cottages be erected on the remainder, one group containing families, the other group the type of lad now cared for.

In the planning of all of these, the possible retention of the Special School should be kept in mind.

Brigadier Steer will suggest to the Armys' Senior Officers that this Division should be approached for technical information before any major decision is made.

Brigadier Steer comes with a mixed reputation. He has spent most of his working life in the Salvation Army in residential boys work and according to Mr. Hughes, was highly thought of in Tasmania (where he spent several years prior to 1969) as enthusiastic and knowledgeable in the field of child care. Major Sumsion, on the other hand, regarded him as rough in his dealings with both staff and boys. My own, very tentative, judgement is that he has a good grasp of administration but a somewhat insensitive personality.

A further visit will be paid in autumn, 1970.

D. Jaggs.

D. Jaggs.
Supervisor of Voluntary Homes.
23.2.70.

THE DIRECTOR OF FAMILY WELFARE:

through

O/C CHILDREN'S HOMES:

W.P. Hughes
10.3.70
See AB 13/3

O/C Children's Homes